



THAT SMASH ON THE JAW WAS LIKE HAVING AN ELEVATED HIT YOU.

TIBERIUS SMITH

His "Mill" with Chuck McBur

By HUGH PENDEXTER

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"We loafed about Godthaab for two weeks before I could prevail upon Tib to let the Arctic circle giants go by the board. Then we caught a Newfoundland whaler and beat across to Cape Gridley, where we were to look for any mail that might have been brought up by the last boat."

"Then came the frisk of wind that drove the tub well inside and made it imperative for us to tarry in that dread northland for yet another bout with fate, in which, incidentally, Tib was destined to eclipse all Ribby O'Hara and Harlem Slasher records, and make the Butcher's Own, with his new scissors blow, look like an aged dame working dollies. For it was after we left the whaler in high disgust at Tuvak, or the Smooth Rock trading-post, that Tib Cleaned up Chuck McBur, the welter-weight champion of the Little Seal river and Hudson Strait. A million-dollar baby boy was the gate receipts, and the winner was to take all."

"Now, you know, I had always hankered for the boxing game a bit, but Tib, because of his New England upbringing, had but little use for the sport, and always insisted an angry man in a righteous cause could make the average pug into oblivion. Yet, despite his aversion to professional bouts, he opened a new vista in fistic possibilities, and was the first man to introduce the sprocket-wheel smash to the shores of Ungava and the Strait. Dear, dear! what a mill it was, and neither of 'em wore the American flag or talked into phonographs!"

"But let me hark back and not spoil the finale. The circus management had given Tib carte blanche to pick up whatever odds and ends he could in event of failure to snare a giant, and as a side issue he had brought along the faithful old picture machine that once made him president of Arcate. It was his intention to snap a series of pictures of the rough and rugged life, on the side, and profit by them when once embarked in business on his own hook. This machine we had tenderly brought with us from Godthaab on the whaler. As soon as we reached the post, Finzer, the agent, gave us a 22-carat welcome, and when Tib set up his gallery in the long, low house and began squirting on the screen scenes from Central park and Palm Beach, our host could only wince away pearly tears and moan, 'Man, man, never leave us.' This was a great game of Tib's. With that loyal apparatus he knew he could capture the affections and cooperation of any agent or factor on the circuit and obtain more favors than if he had paraded out a fat salary. It was to them what beads and tin cans are to aborigines, and more than once did we find the move paid for all bother and expense."

"And because he understood these men and had anticipated meeting them, he had waived his hostility to the bruising pastime and had trotted along three or four six-round goes between different celebrated Chickens and Gouger Boys. I thought the gang would go daffy with glee. They kept him working the films slowly, so they could doze out just how each lemon was donated. And the old boy, although the pictures had taught him all he knew of the sport, could so adapt himself to our host's humor as to rant learnedly on just how a telling jolt was delivered. When the screen got hazy he would illustrate on my person, and the spectators quickly decided he invented flat-cuffs."

"I confess I deplore its brutality," he concluded, apologetically, evading my admiring gaze. "And yet candor

compels me to insist that had the Wharf Rat led with his right he would have sent the Smasher to the ropes."

"Ah," sighed Finzer, lamely sparing at his shadow, "if one of those lads could only stub up against the Chuck McBur outfit and chasten it."

"This called for an explanation, and our host described McBur as a very unwholesome neighbor. It seems his long, lank frame contained the crossed blood of the Athabascan Injun and the worst traits of a white sea captain. Finzer said Chuck's grandpa was a New Bedford whaler, when that port was wearing out the water with its many boats, and had lost his ship in Ungava in the early days. Half crazy, he had refused to return and take the owners, and had joined a tribe of vagrants on the Little Seal river instead, and ultimately took a wife. One thing the old fellow was strong on, and that was the art of self-defence. Sea captains in his day, of course, had to be ever ready to go to the mat with a mutinous sailor. Thus, because of his prowess and the Little Seal people's ignorance of the pummeling business, he soon came to be considered the only patent medicine on the coast."

"Naturally he taught his son the game, and so it was handed down to the present polyglot, who now bossed the tribe. 'Taken all together, they are a bad combination, all right,' declared Finzer. 'Several of our boys who had stolen up there to find out where they mine the gold they sometimes bring here to swap for rum, tobacco and gunpowder have forgotten to return. Chuck's people are not at home now, but when they return I am going to collect a few of my men and run them out. Only last night my best hunter was telling me the missionary at Tuvak had lost his one-year-old boy—been kidnapped, you know; and if Chuck McBur wasn't in on the deal the youngster eloped by himself. Say, give us some more of those fights. They're great.'"

"It was Finzer's chance remark about the gold flakes, mined by the tenants of the Little Seal, that set Tib to yearning to discover their lode. 'Now that this Chuck, or whatever they style him, has led his children up north, why not sneak over to that stream and do some prospecting,' he began; and I knew he would have his way. For two days I stood him off, but as Finzer repeated there was no danger, the territory being deserted, I finally capitulated, and we borrowed two men and a boat and ultimately knocked along the coast and landed at the mouth of the river. We ordered the men to drop anchor and await our return, and to send a posse after us if we failed to ring in after seven days."

"For the first day we hardly got out of sight of our boat, so intent was Tib examining every bit of ledge and tamping with every bowlder with his hammer. But we didn't find enough gold to fill a tooth. For the next two days we pressed inward rapidly, and one night, while making coffee on a little island, about as large as your hat, and reached by jumping from rock to rock, I made a big hit. The island was apparently the butt-end of a gold mine. In fact, it needed no geologist to see we'd made a happy haul. Almost every layer of ledge, facing up stream, that I jerked loose contained several scales of the lovely stuff. Tib said if we'd only follow the banks until we struck some falls we doubtless could scoop it out in hunka."

"Oh, yes," I lamented, as the circle narrowed and a galaxy of ugly squaws formed a menacing fringe on the outskirts, "Chuck is away from home, all

right. I'll gamble he's miles from here."

"Don't blame me, Billy," remonstrated Tib. "Maybe they're not so bad as the posters describe. Finzer swore they were absent. Anyway, they haven't hurt us yet."

"Just then Chuck himself strode through the gang."

"Then in quaint English he asked what we wanted and why we wanted it. Tib artlessly said we were looking for gold, and at that the big misnomer snapped his teeth and gave an order to his squat followers. In a second we were flat on our many backs with our pockets turned inside out. When they struck our treasure-trove I thought they would succumb to unwholesome anger, while Chuck, dancing up and down, bellowed for us to tell where we had found color."

"Tib refused until we had come to some agreement as to our safety, whispering to me that if we could only daily with Father Time for two or three days the relief expedition would probably find us."

"After we are dead," reminded Tib, softly, "you'll never know."

"This struck the half-breed as being closely related to exact truth, and he reluctantly put up his toy and ordered some of his babies to tote us into a hut. As we were shouldered along Tib stopped short and cried: 'Hark! Hear that, Billy? It's a child crying, and a white child, or I never managed a circus.'"

Mr. Chuck growled something naughty and slapped the old chap's face, whereas Tib displayed seven different angry colors, and we were hustled away from the neighborhood of the plaintive wailing. The missionary's kid, I reminded, in a whisper.

"That night our ruddy host visited us again and tried to wrench the secret of the lost lode from our unwilling bosoms. 'If you don't tell, I am to whip you each day with these,' he said, thrusting forward two cast-iron palms, each as large as a sea's flipper. Then he made a few savage passes near our respective heads as an intimation that when the blows fell they wouldn't be mistaken for thistle down. And we both observed that he was no novice with his dukes."

"What class is he in, Billy?" inquired Tib, drowsily, as I tossed on my skins unable to close an eye. "Think he must be in the ten-ton class. Thinks he's a fighter—out of date, antique—rolling guard—I could—"

"and the old fellow was sound asleep."

"In the morning Chuck bounced in and point blank demanded me to tell where we had found the flakes. I had no sooner refused than I got a jolt for causing constellations had a midwinter's sky backed from the heavens. That agitated Tib, who sprang forward, only to be measured beside me by a neat left hook. I was so angry I shed a few vain tears. There is something so extremely humiliating in a man's saucy fist."

"No cutting," he grinned, turning to go. "But lots of times I do this with these," and he admired his huge pads proudly."

"After he had left us, Tib collected his head together and tried to think. 'How was that solar-plexus blow given?' he suddenly asked."

"Why," I groaned, nursing my jaw, 'he simply uncoupled his arm and thumped me.'"

"No, no," said Tib, pettishly. "I mean in the picture we were showing."

"That night I rubbed him in oil, and he went to sleep early. Chuck kept the gang quiet outside our dormitory, and we were not disturbed until late next morning. When we stepped out into the sunlight the scenery impressed me as being out of joint. For in the midst of the Seal river's grand old stage settings was a roped arena that looked much like a parcel of the Bowery. And about it was a sea of fat faces, all eying with admiration the husky build of Chief Chuck. And he, despite the keen air, had been prompted by some New Bedford corpulence to strip to the waist, quite in the approved pug style. Near our corner stood an old hag holding a blue-eyed, white-haired, splendid boy wrapped in furs. Lord, sir! His hair and eyes showed me at once he was the missionary's kid."

"Tib teach him to accept my challenge," muttered Tib, throwing off his coat, rolling up his shirt sleeves, and yanking his belt up another notch with a real professional air. 'Why don't he go and get a reputation before meeting the Green Mountain Cannon Ball?'"

"And I stepped into the corner and called the names of the fighters, and the crowd grunted in anticipation of much pleasure. 'Time!' I yelled, my throat getting a bit choky, as I picked up the head of Tib's little hammer, which some elf had broken in driving the stakes. Mr. McBur, welter-weight champion of the Little Seal. Mr. T. Smith, the Vermont Passion Flower, who has licked everything on two legs, no matter how old, between the tropic of Capricorn and Pittsburg. Ready for the first go."

"This spied struck Chuck as being good, and he grinned appreciatively, while Tib bowed gravely and limbered up his right arm."

"Time!"

"And, say, sir, if you could have seen those two midgets mince towards each other on their tiptoes, Tib walking with a catty, hunching step he'd copied from the moving pictures, you would have felt a thrill of joy."

"By good rights he ought to cut a foot off each arm," observed my man, as he ruefully eyed the other's enormous reach, nicely demonstrated when he advanced his immense paw and coily concealed Tib's dimpled palm from view."

"Then in a second they sprang apart, and the big fellow feinted for the heart and snapped a dirty left at Tib's brow. Tib dodged, but the brawny knuckles barked his right eye in passing, and the crowd jeered and rocked back and forth in delight. Well, sir, the smack of that blow cut me to the heart. I simply couldn't bear to see the dear old boy cuffed."

"Kick him, Tib," I groaned, my eyes watering anger."

"Ashamed of you," he mumbled, avoiding a rush and ducking to the ropes. "This seems on the square, and I won't lose the babe by fouling. And he nearly lost his block by pausing to kiss his bleeding digits to the kid. The blow was a left hook and jarred him badly, sir, but after he had caught the kid's eye and made him chuckle and crow and try to jump from the old hag's arms, he seemed to gather new cunning, and for the rest of the round managed to escape serious damage."

"Rush in," I begged, as he sat in the corner and I rubbed some oil on his knobby forehead. 'Infighting, number five pictures, remember,' I whispered."

"He winked his uninjured eye slyly, tossed another kiss to the kid, and I called for round two. Champion Chuck had been walking back and forth before his admirers, showing how hardy he was by delivering stamping-mill blows on his chest. The minute Tib stepped to meet him the

champion's long steel arm shot out like a trip hammer; but, dear, dear! the way Tib bobbed under and around it and sank a pudgy fist into Chuck's cruel face, and followed it up with a two-ton blow over the heart, simply swept 'em off their feet, sir. The old hags began to yowl, and the men threw up their hands to the totem poles beseechingly and asked of their gods why this was thus, and Chuck went to the ropes."

"Oh, no, he wasn't finged with venom when he got up and came gliding towards Rutland's Pride with long, catlike steps! You see, he saw his laurels would wither if he suffered many more jolts like that, even if he ultimately won out by sheer strength. His gamb was to finish Tib easily and gracefully, and when I yelled, 'Hurrah for the Green Mountain Tease!' and Tib made a little deprecatory bow and

smiled on the gurgling, cowering gate receipts, he adopted a crouching style and got Tib over the left eye and below the belt before I could sound the gong."

"The last drive hurt my man like sin, and I was mad clean through at such rank play. By rights he had lost the joust by fouling. Waiting over to him I told him to eliminate that kind of dirty work or I'd give the decision to his opponent, but he grinned sardonically and spitting out a tooth, made a playful lunge at my chin."

"Look out, old chap!" I warned, scuttling back to my panting nonpareil. "He's so mad he'll do all kinds of crooked work to down you."

"Guess it was an accident," gasped Tib, rubbing the pit of his stomach. "What was that hook the Spider used?"

"I told him, and the third round opened with my patron receiving a present on the side of his jaw that quickly puffed up to the size of a South African diamond, but in the rush that followed he worked the hook, and the funny part of it was he thought it was on the level. He had ducked under Chuck's crouching guard and had sent a raking right from jaw to ear, and then, in some outlandish way I never understood, he gave the Seal river belt-holder the point of his sturdy elbow just under the ear. Really, sir, it would have been more humane to have struck Chuck with a spike-maul. He rolled and writhed in agony in his corner, trying to corral his wind, and Tib, throwing out his panting chest, ignored his opportunity to finish the brute, and instead walked in his cocky gait to the ropes and reached out a trembling hand and patted the kid's white hair."

"That moment of tenderness was near his undoing. For the youngster grabbed his crimsoned fingers with all his tiny strength and wouldn't let go. And Tib, despite the fact Chuck was now up and doing, with a heart to make him look like a minced ham, would not yank rudely away. As a result they clinched, and Tib got a stinger on the side that nearly laid him low. I called time repeatedly, but the chief was thoroughly inflamed now, because of the elbow hook, and would not break so long as he thought he was winning. Then the kid took fright, his foolish baby mind instinctively telling him the two men weren't acting polite, and he sent up a shrill howl you could hear even above the guttural clamor of the on-lookers."

"When Tib heard this quivering pipe he struggled like a madman, and gave Chuck the edge of his hand on the bridge of his nose. It was one of those rasping, irritating moves that bring tears, and the double-crosser had to back up."

"I'm almost too old for this game," growled Tib, his breath coming in sobs. "And that rogue acts more unwholesome every round. But wait, I'll teach him who's holding big casino."

"In the next six rounds he upped his man twice, laying open both fat lips, and then smashed in one between the eyes that you could have heard reecho over in Greenland. The chief let out a bellow and began fighting like an octopus, kicking, biting, and scratching, with Tib doing nothing but trying to keep clear."

"Break away!" I yelled, trying to dive between them with outstretched arms, quite like Spike McDougall in the pictures. But it was nearly two minutes before I could get them apart."

"He'll never fight square again," I muttered. Tib, tenderly feeling eight inches from his head in an effort to locate his ear. My heart sank as I counted his bruises, and I could have wept for the jolts he had received. Then my hand hit against the small hammer-head in my side pocket, and inspired, I whispered, passing it over with wizard skill: "Nail him. It just fits the grasp."

"I hate to be so low and ornery even in this kind of a mill," he remonstrated, palming it with all his old-time, parlor-magic grace."

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"But, dear, dear! if you only could have seen Chuck! He sat perfectly quiet, gazing abstractly at a tree, only moving to cautiously place his hand on his jaw. And the astonished crowd saw the swathy flesh puff out to the size of an orange. You see, sir, Tib had been unable to really injure his iron frame and bullet head heretofore. He had made him smart, had pestered him, but he hadn't really weakened him any. That smash on the jaw with the hammer-head was like having the elevated hit you. And the mob, always having believed him invincible, couldn't understand it."

"When he staggered to his feet he lurched to Tib with open hands, and sorrowfully and carefully examined the death dealing knuckles. Then he shook his head gingerly and croaked: 'Big medicine. White man's Shaman is great spirit.'"

"I'm a Methodist," said Tib, grimly, keeping this brass knuckle from all human ken."

"Methodist big medicine," repeated Chuck simply, walking back to his corner with a slightly swollen, erratic gait. "Dam big medicine."

"One of his henchmen speedily brought him a case bottle of cheap rum, and after swallowing the greater portion of this he began to change his mind a bit and protest that the Seal Shaman overstepped any Methodist by several yards. And cracking his heels together to show he was still in fine fettle, he rushed to drag Tib from his corner. It was at this critical point, sir, that Tib delivered his famous sprocket-wheel swing, the blow that lamed his shoulder for a year."

"For, just as Chuck sank almost to one knee in letting drive his sinewy left, Tib sprang two feet into the air and swung his terrible, battling right in a complete circle and brought it down, palm outward, squarely on top of the astonished, barbarous slugger's thick-thatched cranium, not once, but thrice. The hammer-head projected from the fist for an inch. Chuck simply rolled over on his side with one deep groan, and his children howled in horror."

"One, two, three," panted Tib, standing over his foe and accompanying each count-out numeral with a trembling swoop of his fat forefinger."

"O wow! ow!" groaned the heathens."

"Four, five," continued Tib, firmly. "O wow! ow!" Shaman! O-ugh!"

"O wow! ow!" wailed the flat-faced audience, praying in vain to their totem poles."

"Da, da, da," gurgled the baby, as its custodian rolled it into the ring so as to gain freedom of motion to beat her head against the hideously carved wooden pillars."

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"Faster, faster! Give him the count in a rush!" I screamed, entirely losing my head."

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"And the tribe, thinking he was pumping more evil-spring tonic into its leader, began supplicating him with a medley of sounds to quit his magic."

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"Out!" groaned Mr. McBur, thickly, staggering to his feet. "Say, white man, what did it? What brought the darkness?" And in awe and with something akin to reverence he lightly stroked the cluster of horns on the top of his head. For the trio of blows had caused as many little mountain peaks to push up the coarse, black hair."

"Big medicine," replied Tib, setting the baby on his tired shoulder and jumping over the ropes."

"The spectators instinctively started to stop us, but Chuck, being a square sport, once the battle had been fought, hung dizzily to the ropes and with bowing head waved them back. 'Let them all go. Methodist! Big medicine!' he muttered."

"Owe! owe!" coughed the tribe."

"And with the tot in his arms my patron led the way down the Little Seal until we found the men and the boat. I looked back once and saw that Chief Chuck McBur was still clinging to the ropes of the ring, while his children seemed intent on packing up and moving away. Maybe they were deserting a leader whose medicine was so weak, but it was almost pathetic to see the big man lingering on the scene of his downfall."

"And although we never went back for the gold, and although that was the only time Tib ever ached his castor into a ring, he always regrets he had used the hammer-head, until I reminded him of the boy baby kicking up his heels in his father's home in Tuvak."

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